

Optional Assignment 5: Book Review

Each book in this set focuses on one ecosystem, biome or facet of the two (food chains, animal behavior, climate change, etc). The ecosystem/biome books explain what the focus is like, looks at the plants that define each environment, discusses the types of animals that make their homes there, and includes information on why it is important and what is being done to save those in danger. The books are best suited for third or fourth grade students and have a science content focus, specifically the standards around Life Science (4.LS.1 and 4.LS.3).

These books are easy readers and are set up in multiple ways that support Reading and Writing. They are very kid-friendly with easy to read text and vocabulary. They include many colorful pictures and graphics for more detail and information. It also allows us to work on non-fiction text features during class discussions.

In my classroom, I first use these as an introduction to non-fiction texts and how to use them. They all include a table of contents so they also pair very nicely with different graphic organizers as we read and work through a book or two together before the start on their own. This allows me to walk through with them and point out important features, as well as how to find the information they are looking for. Then, these books are used to help students with research for a culminating project/presentation. They are put into small ecosystem/biome groups and are tasked with creating a Google Slides presentation to share with the class. Students use what they have learned in conjunction with information they find through research to meet the requirements of the project. The groups must include 1) definition and description, 2) location with a map, 3) animals with no more than five labeled pictures, 4) plants with no more than five labeled pictures, 5) a food web with pictures, labels and energy arrows, 6) climate, temperature and precipitation amount with one or two pictures, 7) pollutants or disturbances with one or two optional pictures and 8) three to six interesting facts not already included with optional pictures. The books are a fantastic resource as almost all of the information students will need to include can be found in them and are supplemented very nicely by some websites we have found. The major limitation with these is that at the moment, we only have one copy of each book. This is fine for years where the groups work out nicely; but on occasion we have had to double up and it makes sharing the single resource a little tricky. A limitation could also be that they are not a leveled set, so everyone is basically reading the same thing. For the purpose of the project, it is fine, but they could be a little challenging for struggling readers and too simple for more advanced readers. However, for what we currently use them for, it is a limitation that I don't worry about.

